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SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/E AND A/S FRAZER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/21/2018

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - PIRACY SPIKES, COALITION NAVIES BEGIN
PATROLS

REF: NAIROBI 1372

Classified By: Ambassador Michael E. Ranneberger, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S/REL CMFC) Summary: U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) has assigned an international task force of warships to patrol the Gulf of Aden after five commercial vessels were attacked off Somalia's coast since August 19, resulting in three hijackings within the last 24 hours. NAVCENT will establish a buffer zone between the Somali coast, where pirates are based, and shipping lanes off the coast of Yemen. NAVCENT will maintain the patrols until the International Maritime Organization can craft an international solution. Post believes a letter from the USG to Somalia's Puntland government will underscore the urgent need for cooperation. End Summary.

¶2. (S/REL CMFC) In response to a recent rash of Somalia-based pirate attacks, culminating in the attack of five commercial ships since August 19, including three hijackings on August 21, NAVCENT, using ships from its international Combined Task Force 150 (CTF-150), will begin naval patrols in the Gulf of Aden. In the last few months, pirates have ransomed hijacked commercial and pleasure craft and crew for millions of dollars. Ransoms have often been paid by the ships' insurance companies. Authorities in Somalia's semiautonomous region of Puntland, where the pirates are based, have told us they are incapable of stopping the pirates, but some reports suggest officials are directly benefiting from pirates' ransoms. Reftel reported details of earlier Somali pirates' attacks and modus operandi.

¶3. (U) Since July 21, nine ships have been attacked, resulting in six hijackings. Eight of the attacks occurred in the Gulf of Aden; one ship was hijacked off the northeastern Somali coast near the Indian Ocean town of Bandarbeyla. Those hijacked were the Stella Maris (July 21, Gulf of Aden, Danish owned), Thor Star (August 12, Gulf of Aden, Thai owned), Bunga Melati Dua (August 19, Indian Ocean, Malaysian), Irene (August 21, Gulf of Aden, Japanese), and Iran Deyanat (August 21, Gulf of Aden, Iran). Late August 21 a German cargo ship was hijacked in the Gulf. Pirates unsuccessfully attempted to hijack the Gem of Kilakarai (August 1, Gulf of Aden, UK), Voyager V (August 20, Gulf of Aden, ownership unknown), and Mare di Venezia (August 21, Gulf of Aden, Italian).

¶4. (S/REL CMFC) Beginning August 22, ships from NAVCENT's CTF-150 will establish a maritime security zone between Aden

and Sayhut, Yemen, to deter and, if necessary disrupt hijacking attempts. (Note: NAVCENT does not propose to rescue those ships already hijacked. End Note.) By August 29, three U.S. ships and four coalition ships (UK, French, and Canadian) will be paroling the zone. The zone will act as a buffer between the Somali coast and shipping lanes off southern Yemen. NAVCENT will publicize the security zone to the region's shipping, advising them stay north of the security zone while transiting the Gulf of Aden. NAVCENT will maintain the patrols until the international community, led by the UN's International Maritime Organization, and especially Yemeni and Somali authorities, develop long-term solutions to prevent attacks.

15. (SBU) Piracy also threatens delivery of humanitarian food shipments to Somalia's southern regions, hard hit by drought and internal conflict. European and Canadian navies are providing escorts to World Food Program contracted cargo ships through the end of the year. It is unclear who will escort emergency food deliveries beginning in 2009.

16. (C) We believe it is important to press the Puntland president to do more to combat piracy. Septel will provide proposed text.
RANNEBERGER